Carry the Bags

the journey journal

The weight of gender *November 13, 2010*

Posted by Amanda in Fashion, Observations, Personal, Uncategorized.
add a comment

Is it a boy or a girl?

It's the first question someone asks when you have a baby – or even before. These days the gender question might be answered well before birth. It goes along with "do you have a preference for what you have?"

It must be so common to find out the sex of the baby that we had to ask what we'd had in the delivery room because no-one told us.

But since the moment they said "It's a girl", I've felt the weight of responsibility for bringing up a child of the female sex.

If you had asked me in my younger years whether I wanted a boy or a girl, I probably would have strongly preferred a girl. There are a number of reasons for this – I only have a sister, I went to an all girls school. I didn't really grow up with boys and I think for a long time I didn't really 'get' boys.

But when it came to realising that we were actually having a child, it mattered less and less. My only reason for preferring a girl was that we could agree on a name – something that eluded us for a boy.

Unlike many other cultures, it seems the preference for girls in western nations is quite common. I was surprised at the number of people who expressed a hope that I'd have a girl and I've heard parents almost defending why it's good to have boys.

The marketing of baby goods is strongly skewed towards girls – go to any clothing department or baby market and the products for girls outnumber those for boys many times over.

I feel real pressure in bringing up a girl child. How do I instill in her the strength she'll need to stand up for herself in this world where men still have so much of the power and influence? How do I help her to avoid the crippling problems of self-esteem and body image that I suffered? Can I let her know that being intelligent is a good thing for a girl and playing dumb isn't a way to get through your teenage years?

Perhaps these are all problems that I'd have to teach a boy as well, but having a girl, I directly relate it to my own experience.

But the first issue I have to face is dressing this little being – I've never been a 'girly-girl'. I remember loathing pink throughout my childhood and now I eschew anything that is overly feminine or that might cast me in a role of femininity that is contrary to how I'd like to be perceived.

During my pregnancy I was quite outspoken about my feelings about pink and haven't been given much in that particular hue. But within me there is still a battle in my mind as to how we dress her.

When she was in hospital, she wore mostly gender neutral suits but on the day we brought her home, I put her in a dress for the first time and it shocked me to have her put so clearly into the gender box. Do I just accept that I dress differently from Chris and that's the way the world is, or should I avoid the fripperies of so much female clothing? And then there's the aesthetic part of me that wants her to look good – anyone who's seen my wardrobe would understand that it's something I care about and enjoy.

I suppose the only thing I have to fall back on is my own upbringing In my recollection, my parents never tried to strongly put us in the girly camp. My dad took my sister and I hiking and surfing, and we requested and received more lego, car tracks and sporting equipment than we did dolls – or at least I recall preferring those toys.

Perhaps that's the model I need to take with my daughter – don't ask her to be feminine or not, just let her be what she is.

A new journey *November 10, 2010*

Posted by Amanda in Blogs, Observations, Personal.
add a comment

"Carry the bags" was a phrase that Chris used when we were headed overseas for six months of travelling. Sometime he's a reluctant traveller until he is actually on his way so he complained one day that the mammoth journey wasn't for his benefit, he was just going to carry the bags. It became a bit of a joke between us, but really the phrase has a lot more weight than just a flippant comment.

There are lots of journeys in life and we have just embarked on one from which we can never return – parenthood.

Of course the phrase 'carry the bags' is one that's very applicable to any western parent because all of a sudden it seems our life has been invaded by more 'stuff' and more 'bags' than we've ever had before. We're the type who travel for six months with 15 kilo backpacks and yet now we're lucky if we can leave the house with equipment that weighs less than that.

And yet of course the blog title is also apt considering we really are on our way to destination unknown – does parenthood even have a destination? Or is that just the desperate hope that you will live to old age and die before your offspring?

Perhaps now this blog can be an occasional drop-in point for my thoughts on this trip of a lifetime.

Many of our friends were surprised, if not shocked, when we said we were having a baby. We'd managed to cultivate the impression that we were quite happy with our two cats and yearly overseas jaunts. The truth was that although there wasn't the desperate need to have children that some people experience, it is something we had long hoped for, but for a while it didn't seem like it would happen and we were in the process of accepting that perhaps it wasn't meant to be.

I found out I was pregnant in February and it was a big surprise to both of us – a pleasant one, but it was hard to believe. In fact I stayed in denial until the day our daughter Freya was born one week ago.

I had meant to blog throughout the pregnancy, but it just never happened. I was fortunate to have the easiest pregnancy of anyone I know – no sickness, no cravings, no real exhaustion. Even though I ended up having an emergency caesarean after about 24 hours of labour, I can't even say the birth was something I look back on as being particularly eventful until the last hour or so. It was frightening when the baby's heartbeat dropped low enough to warrant the emergency button being pushed and being rushed in to surgery but maybe the drugs have made the rest a bit of a blur.

Having never been a 'baby' person, I was a little concerned about how I would relate to my own child. I can't say I've felt the overwhelming rush of love for my child that many seem to experience in the delivery room but it's certainly something different and deeper than I've felt before. There is something special about holding this little warm bundle who is totally reliant on me.

I thought I was having that moment of 'falling in love' with Freya late one night when I was in hospital. I had just fed her and she was sitting in my arms looking into my eyes for what seemed like a very long time. I really was overcome with wonder that this small child was mine and she was staring into my soul. Then I realised she was actually concentrating on the enormous green production in her pants. But perhaps that's the first lesson in how children keep you grounded.

She's asleep now and will soon wake up needing to be fed. This isn't the post I sat down to write but it's an introduction to how I might use this blog from now on. I have no intention of becoming one of the myriad mummy bloggers and it's more of a place to sort my own thoughts and make some sense of what's happening to us.

I'm glad I called this space "Carry the Bags" so long ago. It might just be a place to dump all my mental luggage as well.

Expensive Australia *October 8, 2007*

Posted by Amanda in Australia, Observations, Travel Diary.
6 comments

Whenever I return to Australia from overseas or look at travelling in Australia, it strikes me just how expensive this country is. One good example is walking tours.

Chris and I are going to Melbourne in December* and I wanted to do a walking tour of the art and grafitti of Melbourne- it is $55 per person for three hours, and that is the cheap tour. Some of the others are up to $95. I couldn't believe how this differs from the walking tours we have taken overseas. That is the great thing about walking tours- the overheads are low so they are usually affordable. But not in Australia apparently. See the list below for a comparison

Berlin €12=$18 AUD and this walk was more than seven hours long! The tours are all conducted by people who have degrees in German history.

London £6 = $14.00 AUD

New York $15 US = $16 AUD

At least two of these cities also run free walks- why is it so expensive here?

*ok the one thing that is not expensive about this trip is the flights. We are going with Tiger for $40 each return including taxes!

Protesting *September 7, 2007*

Posted by Amanda in Australia, Australian politics, Observations.
add a comment

Getting arrested at a protest is one of those things that adds to your life experience. It is like shaving your head. You only want to do it once and for a good cause.

I have done one of the two.

Writer or journalist *September 4, 2007*

Posted by Amanda in Media, Observations.
add a comment

I've been thinking about journalism- can't think why?

I can't help but notice that there are two types of journalists. There are those who want to be writers- they say they want to write for a living and see journalism as a way of doing this. Of course they are more likely to go into print journalism but I think that sometimes they find the environment a difficult one because their love is of words and not necessarily the story.

The other sort of journalist just loves knowing things first and being the one to tell others. These are the news junkies who live for the novelty. During a crisis or disaster, they wait with bated breath for the new developments. The newsroom is the only place they can confess that they wish the floods up the road were a bit closer. Along with the shock, fear or disgust at a developing story, there is exhilaration

and adrenalin.

The writer journalist and the news junkie journalist both have their place but it would be interesting to know which are more inclined to leave the profession and pursue other paths. For me, I know that I can't imagine enjoying a workplace more than a newsroom or studio when a story is breaking.

Brisbane vs Sydney *May 21, 2007*

Posted by Amanda in Australia, Observations, politics.
add a comment

Sydney: We would never consider driving in to the CBD and trying to get a street park. Meters cost about $6.00 per hour.

Brisbane: We always drive into the CBD and always park on the street. Meters cost $2.40 per hour.

Sydney: We rarely ran into people we knew in Sydney.

Brisbane: Almost every time we are out, we run into someone we know.

Sydney: Our people didn't usually know other people's people.

Brisbane: Everyone knows someone that you know, when you didn't realise there was a connection.

Sydney: The beach was 15km away and often took 45 minutes to get there.

Brisbane: The beach is 85km away and it takes an hour to get there, sometimes less.

Sydney: We could walk to the shops or catch the train.

Brisbane: We have to drive everywhere.

Sydney: We could go out to eat Turkish, Lebanese, Portuguese, Italian, Greek, Indian quite close by.

Brisbane: All we seem to eat is Asian (except at Paniyiri last weekend)

Sydney: Three great, affordable Italian pizza shops in the Summer Hill main street.

Brisbane: Haven't found good, affordable pizza yet.

Sydney: We talked to and knew a lot of our neighbours.

Brisbane: Maybe if we had somewhere to live we would have neighbours.

Sydney: Housing is unaffordable.

Brisbane: Housing is unaffordable.

Saving water *March 18, 2007*

Posted by Amanda in Observations.
2 comments

Brisbane is only three weeks away from level 5 water restrictions and we are all being encouraged to do whatever we can to limit our water usage. Brisvegans are being asked to restrict water usage to 140 litres of water per person per day- I think this is down from about 190 litres average now. The most publicised suggestion of the Target 140 campaign is that showers should only be 4 minutes long.

Someone was telling me the other day that some older people don't make appointments on certain days of the week because it is washing day. I think there is merit in that idea because, too often, we just throw things into the washing machine and switch it on. I have lived with obsessive washers who have a load going at least once a day. Let the pile build up and even *gasp* wear things more than once. It isn't going to kill you.

I have been trying to do some research for an article into "The last dunny man". Brisbane still had outhouses in the 1970's. That would be another way to save water if it wasn't for the smell. Surely someone can come up with a way to use less water in toilets.

But the most practical suggestion I heard was that businesses be given incentives to install rainwater tanks to collect the water from warehouse and factory roofing. I think this where there is real potential. If businesses can save money by using their own water, then they might be motivated to look into it.

As for the four minute shower, that is going to be a challenge. Maybe I will have to ask Chris to only shower once every three days because I don't think I can kick the habit.

Everyday ethics *March 12, 2007*

Posted by Amanda in Observations, Personal.
add a comment

I faced an ethical challenge today. When I took my Stella McCartney for Target purchases to the counter, the shop assistant didn't scan the skirt I was buying. The skirt was priced at $99.99 so it is a fair whack of money for most people and certainly for me.

I admit, I hesitated. A part of me just wanted to walk away with my free skirt, but it wouldn't have been free because everytime I wore it, it would stick in my mind. I would rather live without that sort of baggage.

I think we have a responsibility to live as ethically as we can. I am lucky to have a husband who really tries to do this- he thinks about the ethics of almost any situation and it has made me step up to the mark as well.

The pay off of being honest is that life seems simpler without having to feel guilt or remember if I have told the whole truth. So far it hasn't had too many dire consequences either- even when you are admitting a mistake at work or whereever, people seem to appreciate it when I am up front and are less inclined to come down hard.

It is like getting out of debt, I feel like a weight is lifted off my shoulders and it is one less thing I have to worry about. It also makes me a bit of an evangelist for living this way, but I will stop preaching now.

Low fences make good neighbours *February 17, 2007*

Posted by Amanda in Observations, Personal.
2 comments

How long is it since you talked to your neighbours? Do you just nod when you see them in the front yard or do you have the sort of relationship where you chat about the weather and borrow the whipper snipper occasionally? Do you think that your answer to those questions has any relation to how tall your fence is?

So often now, we lock ourselves behind six foot fences and don't have any eye contact with those who live around us. Formerly we had mostly chain link fences that were no more than waist high and we could interact with the people next door.

It makes such a difference when you know the people in your street. We loved living in Summer Hill in Sydney because we knew lots of the residents of the area including those who lived on either side of us. It felt like a community and not just a suburb.

One of the reasons that we moved back to Brisbane was because we might have a snowball's chance of buying a house here and I have been lamenting the fact that we are going to have to move to the 'burbs. But from talking to friends who have already ventured out, a new perspective on this has emerged. It seems that in the older suburbs with the lower fences, people get to know their neighbours more.

One of the interesting results of talking to neighbours is that several of our friends have mentioned that their inner city predjudices have been broken down. The people who live next door mostly lead very different lives, but by talking to them, the commonalities and conversations that are discovered can be a pleasant surprise.

I once read something by a futurist that said that as affordability of housing drops, the creative types will be in the suburbs and they will become the more interesting places to be- maybe this was always the case anyway.

Mints *February 10, 2007*

Posted by Amanda in Observations.
add a comment

Why are some mints an unearthly green that makes them look like they would glow in the dark?

I don't think I will be eating one of them soon.

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